

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 17, 2005

Contact:

Anne Johnson, Director of Communications, (202) 523-3240, ext. 27

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) expresses deep concern about the impending visit to the United States of State Minister Narendra Modi from the Indian state of Gujarat. Three years ago, after a fire on a train resulted in the death of 58 Hindus, hundreds of Muslims were killed across Gujarat by Hindu mobs. Hundreds of mosques and Muslim-owned businesses and other kinds of infrastructure were looted or destroyed and, in the end, as many as 2,000 Muslims were killed. India's National Human Rights Commission, an official body, as well as numerous domestic and international human rights investigators, found evidence of complicity in the attacks by officials of the Gujarat state government, headed then and still by State Minister Modi.

In the months following the violence, the Modi government in Gujarat was widely accused in India of being reluctant to bring the perpetrators of the killings of Muslims to justice. In response to the alleged failures of the Gujarat government, India's Supreme Court declared in October 2003 that it had "no faith left" in the state's handling of the investigations and instructed the Gujarat state government to appoint new prosecutors to examine the religious violence of 2002. In April 2004, in what was seen as an additional indictment of Modi's Gujarat government, the Supreme Court stepped in once more and ordered a transfer of a trial of perpetrators to a neighboring state.

"At a time when the newly elected Indian government and courts have initiated a number of actions to address the tragic Gujarat massacres in which Gujarat state officials were found by India's own investigative bodies to be complicit, the Commission has been concerned that Modi's private visit will only serve inappropriately to give a platform in the United States to someone who has been implicated in grave violations of religious freedom," said USCIRF Chair Preeta D. Bansal.

"The Commission communicated with the State Department about the matter some time

ago. We urge the Department to act with appropriate Indian officials to forestall or prevent the planned visit," Bansal said.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and the Congress.

Preeta D. Bansal ,
- Felice D. Gaer ,